

DATA STANDARDIZATION HELPS ASSESS CONGRESSIONAL REFORMS FOR MILITARY AND OVERSEAS VOTERS

Early ballot transmission increases the likelihood of ballot return and decreases the likelihood of ballot rejection.

This research note uses an innovative election data standard to examine the impact of ballot transmission timing and mode on ballot return and rejection: two significant reforms enacted by the United States Congress in 2009.

Definitions. “*Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) ballot requesters*” are overseas citizens or active duty military (ADM) members located outside of their voting jurisdictions and who requested absentee ballots. “*Transmission timing*” refers to when a ballot was transmitted to a voter. “*Transmission mode*” refers to how a blank ballot was sent to a UOCAVA ballot requester (e.g., mail or electronically).

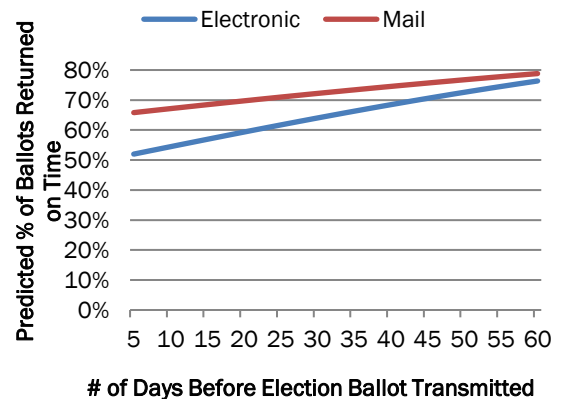
Background. A key obstacle to absentee voting is the time it takes voters to return a completed ballot to an election official. *The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act* helped address this issue by requiring all states to transmit absentee ballots at least 45 days before a federal election and by the voter’s preference of electronic versus mail. Working together, the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and the Council of State Governments’ (CSG) Overseas Voting Initiative (OVI) established a Section B (ESB) Data Standard for data reported in the U.S. Election Assistance Commission’s Election Administration and Voting Survey (EAVS), with the goal of providing better information on the absentee voting process for military and overseas voters as well as the impact of these recent legislative reforms.

Methods. Data were collected from 14 states and jurisdictions using the ESB Data Standard, which standardizes the collection and formatting of election data to allow for in-depth analysis of the

absentee voting process and the impact of the 45-day transmission requirement and mode of delivery.

Key Results. More than two-thirds of ballot requests were received at least 45 days before the election—4% waited until the week before the election. Voters who received their ballots earlier were slightly more likely to return them; their ballots also had less chance of being rejected for inaccuracy or lateness. Voters who received their ballots by mail were slightly more likely to return them than voters who received their ballots electronically.

Conclusion. This research dramatically advances efforts to standardize UOCAVA election data and provides proof of concept for evaluating individual-level research questions related to the absentee



voting process. FVAP will leverage the momentum created from this ESB Data Standard analysis to secure greater levels of implementation across jurisdictions with major populations of UOCAVA voters. Doing so will drastically reduce the burden on jurisdictions from the EAVS Section B data collection to only collecting high-level metrics as points of validation for the ESB Data Standard.